In the Specification:

Please amend the specification as shown:

Please delete the paragraph on page 142, line 13 through page 143, line 15, and replace it with the following paragraph:

Expression of the HCV NS5B protein in insect cells:

The cDNA encoding the entire NS5B protein of HCV-Bk strain, genotype 1b, was amplified by PCR using the primers NS5Nhe5' (5'-GCTAGCGCTAGCTCAATGTCCTACACATGG-3') (SEQ ID NO: 1) and XhoNS53' (5'-CTCGAGCTCGAGCGTCCATCGGTTGGGGAG-3') (SEQ ID NO: 2) and the plasmid pCD 3.8-9.4 as template (Tomei et al, 1993). NS5Nhe5' and XhoNS53' contain two *Nhe*I and *Xho*I sites (underlined sequences), respectively, at their 5' end. The amplified DNA fragment was cloned in the bacterial expression plasmid pET-21b (Novagen) between the restriction sites *Nhe*I and *Xho*I, to generate the plasmid pET/NS5B. This plasmid was later used as template to PCR-amplify the NS5B coding region, using the primers NS5B-H9 (5'-ATACATATGGCTAGCATGTCAATGTCCTACACATGG-3') (SEQ ID NO: 3) and NS5B-R4 (5'-GGATCCGGATCCCGTTCATCGGTTGGGGAG-3') (SEQ ID NO: 4). NS5B-H9 spans a region of 15 nucleotides in the plasmid pET-21b followed by the translation initiation codon (ATG) and 8 nucleotides corresponding to the 5' end of the NS5B coding region (nt. 7590-7607 in the HCV sequence with the accession number M58335). NS5B-R4 contains two *Bam*HI sites (underlined) followed by 18 nucleotides corresponding to the region around the stop codon in the HCV genome (nt. 9365-9347). The amplified sequence, of 1.8 kb, was digested with *Nhe*I and *Bam*HI and ligated to a predigested pBlueBacII plasmid (Invitrogen). The resulting recombinant plasmid was designated pBac/NS5B. Sf9 cells were co-transfected with 3 μg of pBac/NS5B, together with 1 μg of linearized baculovirus DNA (Invitrogen), as described in the manufacturer's protocol. Following two rounds of plaque purification, an NS5B-recombinant baculovirus, BacNS5B, was isolated. The presence of the recombinant NS5B protein was determined by western blot analysis (Harlow and Lane, 1988) of

BacNS5B-infected Sf9 cells, using a rabbit polyclonal antiserum (anti-NS5B) raised against a His-tagged version of the NS5B protein expressed in *E. coli*. Infections of Sf9 cells with this plaque purified virus were performed in one-liter spinner flasks at a cell density of 1.2×10^6 cells/ml and a multiplicity of infection of 5.